VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

SEPTEMBER 2009 FOUR DOLLARS

Marsh Madness • Why Squirrels? • Skinny Water Fishing

Commonwealth of Virginia
Timothy M. Kaine, Governor

Bob Duncan
Executive Director

Recently I had the pleasure of watching one of our Conservation Police Officers, Sgt. David Dodson, receive recognition for his leadership skills by the International Hunter Education Association, who selected him as *Professional of the Year.*

Sergeant David Dodson (C) is joined by Executive Director Bob Duncan (L) and Captain Bobby Mawyer (R).

Sgt. Dodson has been instrumental in coordinating our Hunter Education program, one of the hallmarks of this organization for nearly 50 years. From its inception in 1961, the hunter safety program (as it was called then) has reinforced the importance of safe practices in the field to hunters across the state. Early classes were often sponsored by sportsmen's associations or local, civic groups. Classes were taught by Virginia Game Wardens (now known as Conservation Police Officers), who occasionally brought in mentors with special skills to assist them, or by volunteer instructors trained and certified by the National Rifle Association. The classes usually spanned four hours in length and concentrated on the safe handling of firearms.

Today, we are blessed with a force of 850 volunteer instructors from every region of Virginia who train about 14,000 students each year! Hunter education has broadened to incorporate a 10-hour curriculum, and covers everything from safety and sportsmanship to principles of conservation. In 1988, hunter education became mandatory for 12- to 15-year-olds and all first-time hunters. Since that time, the rate of hunting-related shooting incidents has fallen by approximately 25%.

It is my honor to recognize all members of the Hunter Education program—volunteers and paid staff—who dedicate their time and expertise to promote safe hunting practices. It is through your commitment to this effort that we can say, and appreciate, that more safe hunters and companions are afield. Thank you.

And "hats off" to Sergeant Dodson for his commitment and hard work. I look forward to further details about hunter safety in Sgt. Dodson's feature story, slated for an upcoming issue of this magazine.

If *you* are interested in becoming a Hunter Education instructor, contact the closest regional DGIF office or David.Dodson@dgif.virginia.gov. Safe Hunting!

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; To provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation and to work diligently to safeguard the rights of the people to hunt, fish and harvest game as provided for in the Constitution of Virginia; To promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing; To provide educational outreach programs and materials that foster an awareness of and appreciation for Virginia's fish and wildlife resources, their habitats, and hunting, fishing, and boating opportunities.

Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

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Color separations and printing by Progress Printing, Lynchburg, VA.

Virginia Wildlife (ISSN 0042 6792) is published monthly by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Send all subscription orders and address changes to *Virginia Wildlife*, P. O. Box 7477, Red Oak, Iowa 51591-0477. Address all other communications concerning this publication to *Virginia Wildlife*, P. O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1104. Subscription rates are $12.95 for one year, $23.95 for two years; $4.00 per each back issue, subject to availability. Out-of-country rate is $24.95 for one year and must be paid in U.S. funds. No refunds for amounts less than $5.00. To subscribe, call toll-free (800) 710-9369. Postmaster: Please send all address changes to *Virginia Wildlife*, P.O. Box 7477, Red Oak, Iowa 51591-0477. Postage for periodicals paid at Richmond, Virginia and additional entry offices.

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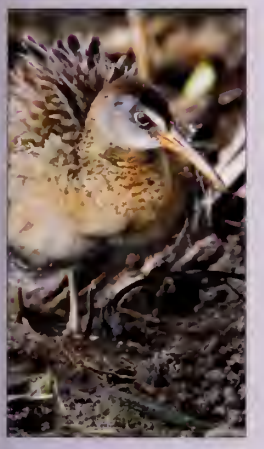

About the cover: Clapper rails (*Rallus longirostris*) are one of four rail species found in Virginia. Hunting the elusive bird can be thrilling. See story on page 4.
©*Maslowski Photo*

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VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

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24 issues for $23.95

Marsh Madness

©David Hart

by David Hart

Things haven't changed much on the Eastern Shore since the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel opened in 1964. There are a few more residents now and traffic may have increased a little, but the fishing is still good and lifelong Eastern Shore residents will tell you the rail hunting has never been better.

You've never heard of a rail? How about a marsh hen? That's what a lot of Eastern Shore hunters call them. Still doesn't ring a bell? You aren't alone. Although bag limits are generous—Virginia hunters can take as many as 40 birds in a day—and hunting opportunities are virtually limitless, rails are one of the state's best-kept secrets. They are also one of the most unique hunting opportunities anywhere. Think: a long-legged quail in a salt marsh.

There are actually four species of rails available to hunters in Virginia. Only one, the clapper rail, is found in the salt marshes of the barrier islands in great numbers. The others are found primarily in freshwater marshes, says Department waterfowl biologist Gary Costanzo. Hunters are allowed 25 sora and Virginia rails combined, and 15 king and clappers combined. According to data compiled by the Harvest Information Program, or HIP, clappers make up about 85 percent of the total harvest. About 14 percent of the annual harvest consists of sora rails, and kings and Virginia rails make up the rest.

"There are some rails taken in freshwater marshes, but the vast majority of the hunting takes place on the Eastern Shore and it's pretty much all clappers," says Costanzo.

According to HIP data, hunters average around 15 birds per season. However, those who hunt at the right time and know rails and their habits can fill up a game pouch pretty quick. In fact, action can be downright crazy. Dave Griffith, a real estate broker from Cape Charles, times his hunts with the flood tides that occur just a handful of days each season. When the moon, wind, and other natural forces combine to flood the Eastern Shore marshes around his home, Griffith loads his boat, grabs a friend or two, and heads for the nearest boat ramp on the Shore's seaside. That's where countless grass-covered marsh islands offer an endless bounty of rail hunting opportunities. When the marsh floods, however, those islands are typically under water. And that's when the rail hunting gets good, says Griffith.

High Tide, Fast Action

Normally, rails don't fly much, even when they are pushed by a line of hunters slogging through the marsh. That's why locals like Griffith don't bother to hunt when the tide is low and the myriad islands are dry. Most are covered with knee- to waist-high cordgrass and rails simply hold or move ahead of walking hunters. High water, however, forces the birds onto the remaining dry ground where they are easy to locate.

A handful of natural events will create prime hunting conditions, and the Department sets the rail season to maximize hunting opportunities based around those conditions. Season dates will vary each year to capture as many flood tides as possible within the federally allotted 70-day season, which typically starts in early or mid-September and runs into November. At best, hunters will have two prime tides per month, but other events like hurricanes or strong Nor'easters can push lots of water up against the coast, flooding the seaside barrier islands and creating additional hunting opportunities.

"Sometimes there will be a half-dozen or more rails on one small high spot," says Griffith. "I'm looking for anything that lets the birds sit without getting their feet wet. They gather in duck blinds, on small tumps, or on floating mats of grass. If you look across the marsh when it's flooded and you see something that isn't under water, go take a look."

Griffith and other dedicated rail hunters simply use the time honored tradition of a long pole to push a boat across the water to any spot that looks like it should hold a few birds.

Generous limits, fast action, and plenty of public marsh make rails the perfect game bird.

©David Hart

©David Hart

Rails, or marsh hens, are often accessed by boat on a flood tide (pg. 4). A retriever can help flush birds that don't want to fly, as well as retrieve birds dropped in tall grass or deep water.

It's illegal to hunt migratory birds in a boat that is under gas or electric motor power, but a push-pole is perfectly legal. So is wind. When he can, Griffith will allow the wind to push his boat toward the high spot while his partner waits for birds to flush.

He doesn't, however, hunt the shoreline or large islands with acres of high ground. Birds adjacent to large areas of dry land are too hard to flush because they can keep walking ahead of approaching hunters, slipping in and out of any cover they can find.

The Hard Way

That's not to say it's impossible to flush a rail on a low tide or on dry ground. In some situations, it's fairly easy. Captain Matt Mason, a Chincoteague resident and part-time guide, island hops, jumping from one small rise to another, no matter what the water, weather, or tide. He simply runs the bow of his boat onto land, throws out an anchor, and goes for a walk. Instead of slogging through the muck in a random path, he instead devises a calculated plan for each island he hunts.

"You want to push the birds toward a point or at least to one side of the island. If you have a couple of other hunters, walk in a line about 20 or 30 feet apart while heading toward a point if you can," he says. "It's also a good idea to walk a few yards from open water because rails will be forced to fly if they are squeezed against the edge."

Because rails will either run or simply duck and wait for a hunter to pass, Mason sometimes relies on a trick used by old-time rail hunters. He drops a few pebbles into empty drink cans and ties them to a length of rope about 50 feet long and attaches each end of the rope to a hunter's waist. As the hunters walk, the cans pass directly over hiding birds and rattle along the top of the grass, which can make the birds nervous enough to fly.

Mason doesn't necessarily search for a particular type of island when the tide is low. All of them hold rails at one time or another. He does, however, favor those that are a mix of tall and short cover. The problem with the tall grass, he notes, is that it allows rails to hunker down and let hunters walk past.

"If you can get them out in the shorter grass, around a foot or less, you have a much better chance of getting them to flush," he says.

During the first weeks of the season, Mason recommends wearing long pants and a pair of old shoes that you don't mind getting wet and muddy. No matter how hard you try, you're going to get dirty, he says.

©Maslowski Photo

Rail hunting gets good when the water floods seaside marsh islands in September/October. Cans tied to a rope, attached to walking hunters (below), can help flush birds that might otherwise let you pass by. It's an old trick that still works.

Non-Toxic Shot Required

As of the 2008 season, non-toxic shot is required for all rail hunting. Both Griffith and Mason recommend #7 ½ shot in either 20- or 12-gauge, but any shotgun will do the job.

"I like an improved cylinder choke because the shots are going to be fairly close and the birds are pretty easy to knock down," says Griffith.

A salt marsh can be tough on guns, so consider using a shotgun you don't mind splashing through salt water and mud. But be ready to clean it as soon as you get back on dry land.

©David Hart

That's okay. Splashing through the cool water is a welcome relief from the sometimes-searing heat and humidity. As the season moves into mid-October, Mason switches to waders and he'll start keeping an eye out for higher tides that concentrate the birds.

"They are starting to move out then and there is a little more hunting pressure, so the birds can be a little tougher after the season has been open for four or five weeks. A flood tide can concentrate the remaining birds and make them much easier to find," he says.

Bird dogs can point rails, but Mason says the sharp grass and shells common in rail habitat are tough on a dog's feet. He recommends fitting a dog with booties, or simply leaving it at home. He hunts with his Labrador retriever, which helps flush birds and locate those knocked down by hunters.

Room to Roam

Virtually all of the Eastern Shore barrier islands are open to public hunting. Most are state property, a few are owned by the Department, and some are under the national wildlife refuge system. A few others belong to the federal government or the Nature Conservancy, and a handful are privately owned. The government islands are typically well marked with signs designating them as such; in most cases, so are the privately-owned islands. As a general rule, if it isn't posted, it's fair game. Costanzo says Mockhorn Island Wildlife Management Area is a good place to start. It's basically 7,000 acres of mud and grass islands intersected by serpentine guts, ditches, and larger creeks. There is some high ground with pines, bayberry, and cedars, but mostly, it's a vast series of marshy islands—perfect rail country.

"Mockhorn gets a fair amount of pressure when the conditions are right because a lot of people don't realize most of the other marsh islands are open to hunting," says Costanzo. "Generally speaking, if it isn't attached to the mainland or if it isn't posted, you can hunt it."

There are a handful of boat launches scattered up and down the seaside of the Eastern Shore. The newest is located on the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge just a few miles from the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel. It offers quick access to the southernmost barrier islands, including Mockhorn Wildlife Management Area.

©David Hart

If you hunt on foot, walk along the water's edge and try to push birds toward points. Rails will avoid flying unless they have to.

There are also ramps in Oyster, Red Bank, Wachapreague, and Folly Creek, and a small ramp is located on the causeway between the mainland and Chincoteague Island, offering easy access to the countless islands in that area. □

David Hart is a full-time freelance writer and photographer from Rice. He is a regular contributor to numerous national hunting and fishing magazines.

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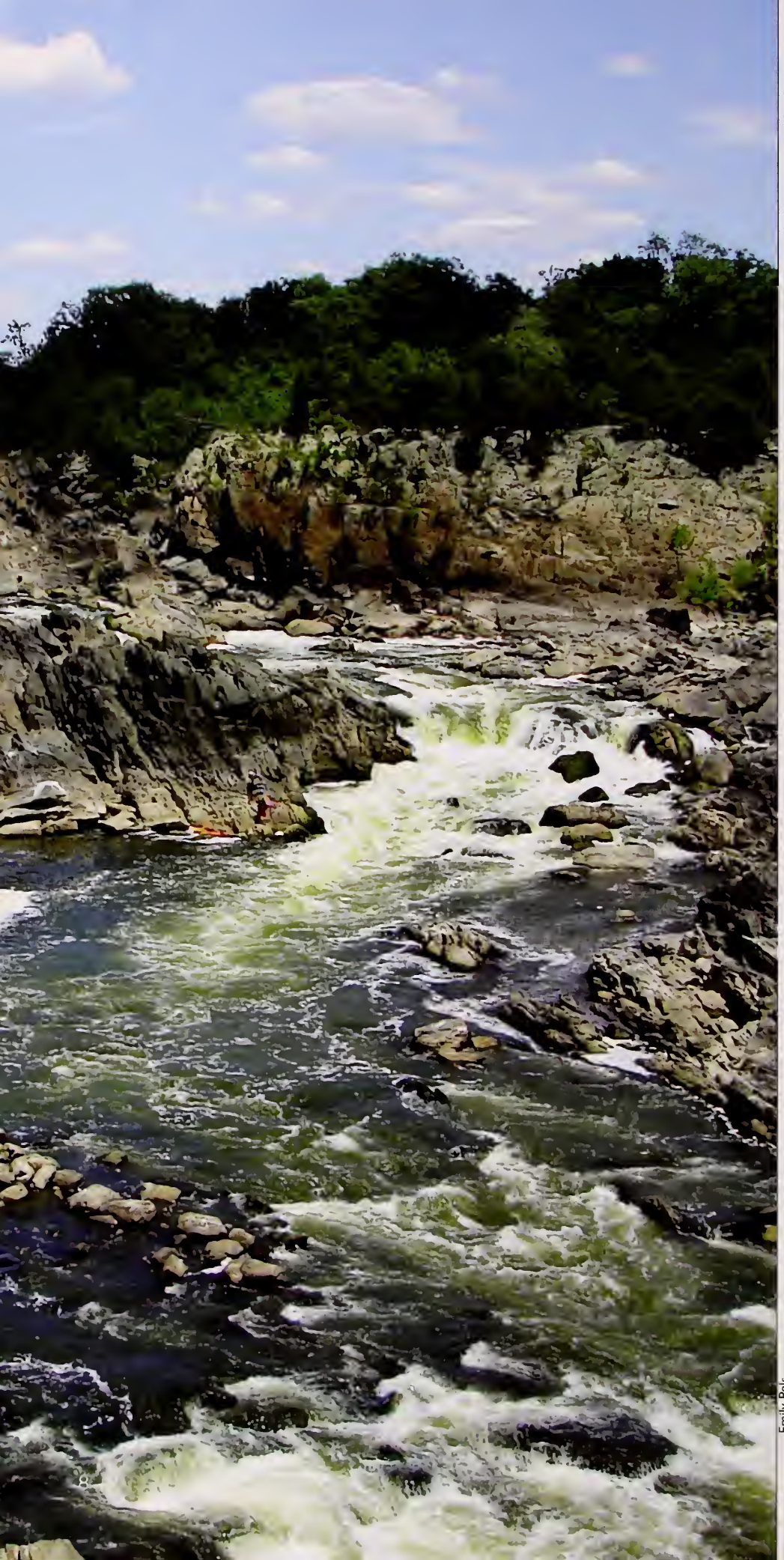

Emily Pels

Angling on the Nation's River

The Tidal Potomac Reveals its Wild Side

by King Montgomery

The boundary between the District of Columbia and Virginia is the tidal Potomac, a stretch of river with a split personality. Much of it is an urban fishery surrounded by high-rise buildings on the Virginia side and by many of our national monuments and seat of government on the other. Some spots, however, remain almost wild, particularly where the river narrows upstream of Georgetown to the Chain Bridge across from McLean. Here, deer come down from the wooded hills to drink, red foxes roam the banks looking for food, and waterfowl have their chicks, cygnets, and goslings in the spring and then move to warmer locales come late fall. By autumn, the pleasing sounds of geese honking overhead combine with the sight of gorgeous reds and yellows of the hardwoods. Both sides of the river, regardless of personality, are inextricably joined by the beauty of the seasons, and by a common history.

©King Montgomery

Left, Great Falls, between Virginia and Maryland, lies just above the District of Columbia and its shared jurisdiction of the Potomac River. Above, largemouth bass and other sunfishes congregate near docks and manmade structures.

The Early Days

In 1608, on a journey up the Potomac from the Chesapeake Bay, Captain John Smith wrote of seeing more fish in one place than he had ever witnessed before. Indians along the river relied on fish for food and barter. When European settlers established a foothold in the New World, sturgeon were plentiful enough to support a major fishery.

The Potomac also featured largely in the early struggles of the young country. In 1812, the British sailed up the river and burned parts of Washington, DC, including the White House. During the American Civil War, the river formed a boundary between opposing armies and ways of life. In battles at Harpers Ferry, Antietam, Gettysburg, and dozens of other places, the Potomac played a vital role as a natural obstacle or supply line for one side or the other.

As agriculture and industry developed and prospered in the fertile Potomac plain, byproducts of our ignorance and unconcern turned the river into a foul smelling, seemingly stagnant, almost lifeless body of water. By 1960, parts of the river were virtually dead. The Clean Water Act of 1968 established a long-term plan and funds for cleaning up and maintaining the Potomac. Fortunately, by the 1980s the river was on its way to ecological recovery, and has become one of the best tidal largemouth bass fishing rivers in the country.

The tidal portion of the Potomac flows 108 miles, from just below Little Falls near Langley to its 11-mile-wide mouth between Maryland's Point Lookout and Virginia's Smith Point where the river enters the Chesapeake Bay. The first 11 miles of its tidal life—from a mile or so below Little Falls to the draw-span of the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge that connects Maryland and Virginia via Interstate 95 and the Capital Beltway—belongs to the District of Columbia. You need a DC license to fish this stretch. The remainder of the Potomac falls under Maryland's jurisdiction from shore to shore: Maryland's spoils from a British crown land grant in the 18th century. This fact still causes serious water use conflicts between Maryland and Virginia today.

The Fishery

There are over 60 species of fish swimming the tidal Potomac. In the freshwater reaches, before the water turns from brackish to salt, largemouth bass reigns supreme. The largemouth is joined by lesser numbers of its smallmouth cousins, and a

©King Montgomery

Anglers catch largemouth, smallmouth, and striped bass, and other game fish within sight of national monuments.

Weedless Fly

resident population of juvenile striped bass, born in the river and awaiting their time—usually three to five years—to become sexually active and head downriver to the Chesapeake and, eventually, Atlantic Ocean. During late winter and spring, other migratory species such as herring, hickory shad, yellow perch, white perch, and the large breeding-age stripers move up into DC waters to spawn. Factor in the sunfishes—primarily bluegill, rock bass, crappie and carp, channel and blue catfish—and you'll see why you never know what you'll catch when you fish these waters.

In the fall, the black basses and sunfishes will concentrate in areas where food and cover are available and feed heavily, particularly during the warmer periods of the day. This culinary frenzy helps the fish get into optimum shape for winter's leaner times.

Tides are very important in the lives of all river creatures, but particularly to fish. In each 25-hour cycle, the tide will rise and fall twice, with an average change in depth of about 18 to 24 inches. All fish, from the smallest minnows to the largest striped bass, are most active and apt to be caught during moving water, either in or out. The creatures at all links of the food chain are stimulated by water's movement and an increase in feeding levels usually results as the tide pulls. Unless they are in eddies or slack water, the fish face into the current and, like trout in a stream, are usually on the down-current side of a structure waiting for food to float or swim by, so present your fly or lure accordingly.

Structure Holds Fish

The tidal Potomac between Virginia and the District of Columbia flows through a primarily urban environment, where manmade and natural types of fish-holding structures are found. A structure can be quite large, such as the huge boulders near Fletcher's Boathouse well upstream of Georgetown. In contrast, you'll also find small patches of vegetation, road and rail bridge supports, sea walls, piers and docks, boat marinas, spoils areas, and an expansive hydrilla field stretching between DC's main sewage processing facility to just beyond the Woodrow Wilson Bridge.

The rocks at Fletcher's Boathouse cause enticing eddies and swirls and some fallen trees along the banks add more, albeit transient, structure. This pattern continues downstream to the Three Sisters Islands with rocky shallows located near very deep water. Then comes the Francis Scott Key Bridge between Arlington and Georgetown. Bridge abutments are excellent places to cast a fly or lure. There are also old stone bridge/aqueduct supports just upriver from the bridge that hold black bass and stripers, particularly a support completely underwater near the middle reaches.

Moving downstream, seawalls and bridges provide the primary structure with some scattered patches of aquatic vegetation, including spatterdock (lily pads) around Roosevelt Island. The Pentagon Lagoon on the Virginia side is a superb place to get out of the wind and catch fish, all within the shadow of the Pentagon. Other spots to check out as you move downriver from the Capital to

©King Montgomery

Quiet moments are sometimes interrupted by jetliners landing and taking off from Reagan National Airport.

You may need more than one fishing license, depending on where you cast. For more information, check:
www.dgif.virginia.gov
www.prfc.state.va.us
www.dnr.state.md.us

Numerous bridges span the tidal stretch of the river, providing good habitat and good fishing opportunities. ©King Montgomery

the Wilson Bridge include the numerous bridges and the boat docks or marinas along the way. The Washington Channel, a dredged, manmade waterway, is home to the seawall of Fort Leslie J. McNair, numerous docks, and a fish market complex where the channel stops at the flood gates of the Tidal Basin not far from the Jefferson Memorial. Vegetation grows along the seawall and a significant drop-off provides good fishing. The Washington Yacht Marina and mouth of Four Mile Run near Reagan National Airport on the Virginia side are also productive, particularly during an outgoing tide.

Across the river from Alexandria is DC's Blue Plains sewage treatment facility. The warm effluent, although stinky at times, contains questionable nutrients which help create an aquarium-like environment where fish abound and respond to a well-cast lure or fly. Fish congregate here in the fall and winter because the warm water effluent keeps temperatures higher than the rest of the river.

Downstream and mid-river is an extensive flat created by the dumping of dredge spoil over the centuries. Fertilized by Blue Plains, the flat is covered with hydrilla, and is a place to consistently catch fish, particularly during spring and fall. The nearby Spoils Cove, straddling the DC and Maryland line, is a great place to fish and escape from the wind. The Spoils has riprap made of the decking removed from the old Wilson Bridge during its last major face-lift and two concrete/asphalt "islands" that provide a haven for fish of all species, a home to a beaver family, and nesting places for ducks and geese.

Almost any of the Wilson Bridge pilings should hold fish at various times of the year. The main channel runs under the draw-span on the Virginia side, but a secondary channel mirrors it on the Maryland bank; the three or four pilings on either side of these channels usually are most productive for the angler.

Since there are relatively few places to fish from shore on either the Washington or Northern Virginia banks of the river, most angling occurs from boats. These can range from canoes, kayaks, and johnboats for use in coves and creeks, to 20-foot bass boats in the main channel. I usually carry several fly and spinning/casting rods rigged for many contingencies.

As you can see, the 11-mile water boundary between the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth is an interesting, fun place to fish. The likelihood that you will appreciate a bit of history while daydreaming as you cast your fly or lure into the water is pure bonus. □

King Montgomery is an outdoor and travel writer/photographer who lives in Burke. Winner of numerous writing and photo awards, he is a former fly-fishing guide on the Potomac.

Sunfish, ©King Montgomery

©Eric Rutherford

Why Squi

A great introduction to hunting, for a youngster, and a way to enjoy the companionship of a good squirrel dog

by Tee Clarkson

There are thousands upon thousands of pages written each year chronicling man's adventures in the cold, tidal marshes and swamps with the big waterfowl dog breeds like labs and Chesapeakes. Even the water spaniels and Boykins make a few headlines along the way. And still there are thousands more pages paying homage to the pointers, spaniels, and setters that cut wide swaths across the fields, lowlands, and mountains in search of the wild scent of quail, partridge, pheasant, and grouse. There are far fewer tales, however, dedicated to squirrel dogs, and to the men, women, and youngsters who follow them through the hardwood forests of the Southeast.

Allen Stigall is one of these men. He bought his first hunting license in Washington County, Virginia, for one dollar when he was eight years old. He is 71 now and has been hunting all the years in between. Over that time he has hunted deer, grouse, and waterfowl in the southwest part of the state. Now he just hunts squirrels. The main reason, his squirrel dogs.

irrels?

©Eric Rutherford

©Eric Rutherford

One of Stigall's seven squirrel dogs, a red Finnish Spitz, trees a fox squirrel. Below: Squirrel hunting is a great way to introduce kids to hunting and is likely to produce successful results.

©Dwight Dyke

"Without a dog as a companion, I just don't enjoy the hunt," Stigall says. He has seven squirrel dogs, all of them red Finnish Spitz. Upon first looking at them, these 20- to 30-pound national dogs of Finland with red fur and upturned tails look more like pets than hunters. In Finland they hunt birds similar to turkeys, but here they are primarily used for treeing wild game like squirrels, bobcats, and raccoons.

As for the popularity of squirrel hunting in Virginia, Gary Norman, who supervises small game and furbearer projects for the Department, reports that roughly one-third of the hunting population in Virginia hunts squirrels. That equates to somewhere in the neighborhood of 68,000 squirrel hunters in the state. Only a small percentage hunts with dogs. Last year these hunters logged 425,000 days in the woods, harvesting 685,000 gray squirrels and 110,000 fox squirrels.

"It is an underutilized wildlife species and sport," Norman says of squirrels and squirrel hunting. With a season that runs from early September through January, there are ample opportunities to get out in the woods in search of squirrels, especially when all the wildlife management areas and most, if not all, state and national forests allow hunting to some extent. "With timber management now, forest species are thriving," says Norman, "which means lots of small wood lots and perfect habitat for squirrels."

Finding a viable squirrel hunting option is as easy as locating the closest public hunting grounds on the

©Eric Rutherford

Department's *Find Game* program (www.findgame.org).

As with any outdoor pursuit, there is never really a bad time to be in the woods or on the water with friends, family, or by oneself. In terms of squirrel hunting, the best time to go during the season is, generally, when most of the leaves are off the trees, simply because this allows the hunter better visibility. That does not mean one cannot be successful earlier in the season.

"I cannot imagine a better sport and opportunity to introduce youngsters to hunting based on the population of squirrels and availability of hunting land," Norman says. The beauty of squirrel hunting for youngsters is multi-faceted. Typically speaking, it is something they can do close to home. They are likely to have success, and it also allows them to practice different tactics necessary in other types of hunting that they may get into later: stalking, still hunting, and even hunting behind dogs. While most adult hunters use .22 caliber rifles for squirrels, shotguns are a great option for youngsters.

Allen Stigall agrees with Norman concerning getting youngsters out in the woods. He has noticed fewer and fewer squirrel hunters since he began the sport in his youth. Not hunting by himself anymore, he enjoys the company of other hunters during the 30 to 40 days he spends in the woods each year. He specifically relishes the opportunity to take young people out.

Last fall Stigall set out in the hills of southwest Virginia with Eric Rutherford, a wildlife photographer and friend. Bringing along Rosebud, Simon, and Delilah, three of Stigall's favorite dogs, the two began their hunt mid-morning. The dogs were off quickly in search of fresh scent and the hunters followed along leisurely. Unlike beagles, the Finnish Spitz do not make any noise until they have something in a tree, so there is no way to know if they are on a scent until you hear them. It wasn't long this day before Rutherford and Stigall heard the tell-tale yapping of the dogs in the distance. They had treed a squirrel.

True to form, as the hunters approached they found all three dogs surrounding a tall oak. Eyes scouring every inch of tree branch, it did not take long before Stigall spotted a gray squirrel curled where the base of a large limb met the trunk.

This is perhaps where Stigall is at his best, with a .22 caliber rifle in his hand. In November of 2007 he shot the highest score ever recorded in a benchrest shooting competition for the 6 target A66–Indoor category.

"It's almost a sin to shoot one behind the ears," he says. In this case he did not disappoint. With one in the bag, the dogs were off again and the scene replayed itself plenty more times throughout the morning and into early afternoon.

So as outdoor writers continue to spin yarns on the stylish points of the German Shorthair or the unbelievable blind retrieves of the Chesapeake Bay retriever, Allen Stigall will continue to walk the woods with his red Finnish Spitz, perfectly content with their style and companionship. He will no doubt enjoy a wonderful day in the woods, and quite possibly introduce a youngster to the sport he has loved for well over 50 years. □

Tee Clarkson is an English teacher at Deep Run High School in Henrico Co. and runs Virginia Fishing Adventures, a fishing camp for kids: tsclarkson@virginiafishingadventures.com.

Reminder

Squirrel hunting has been expanded to include a June season (June 5–19, 2010). Hunting is allowed on all private lands and on certain wildlife management areas. For more information and a list of wildlife management areas, the *2009–2010 Hunting and Trapping in Virginia* regulation booklet can be found online at www.HuntFishVA.com.

New DVD Available

"Squirrel Skinning Quick and Easy and Panfish Preparation and Filleting" can be purchased through the DGIF store: **www.HuntFishVA.com**

©Eric Rutherford

FOOD for Body and Mind

Virginia Naturally

Central High School's FFA and the Food for America Day

story and photos by Gail Brown

After more than a week of cold and rain, the May skies over Central High School remained ominous. Events had been canceled, picnics had moved inside, and it did not look good for the *Food for America* program, scheduled by Central's FFA (formerly, Future Farmers of America). Goals of the *Food for America* program include teaching elementary school students the importance of agriculture and how it affects their lives on a day-to-day basis. To that end, FFA students bring a variety of farm animals—horses, goats, and chickens—educational displays, and farm equipment to campus. And while a little mud certainly won't bother the pigs and cows, attendees (teachers included) might find slipping and sliding a bit of a challenge.

When asked if the program would proceed as planned, the best that FFA advisor and teacher Dana Fisher could offer: "We'll just have to wait and see. That back field's pretty wet."

No matter. Everyone in the close-knit Shenandoah County community of Woodstock knew that when pickups loaded with livestock (followed by a planter and haybine) were seen winding their way up Susan Avenue, the *Food for America* event was about to begin!

FFA is an important part of the culture and educational experience at Central High and in the Woodstock community. Teacher Sherry Heishman has seen FFA and agricultural education classes grow and develop over the 24 years she has been at Central. She believes FFA is an important part of the rural farming experience. In addition to FFA's *Food for America* program, organizational members lead and participate in a number of community service programs such as the local *Adopt-A-Highway* program, their yearly schoolwide canned food drive, and various educational efforts designed to teach others about agriculture and the natural world.

FFA also contributes to the community by processing deer donated by local hunters and the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries for the *Hunters for the Hungry* program. This past year, Central FFA members processed 16 deer which provided over 500 pounds of venison for a local food bank. Always looking for ways to "stand on their own two feet," students' hard work in agricultural classes, successful fundraisers (such as citrus sales and sales of plants grown in their new greenhouse), and scholarships provided by the local Dodge dealership have resulted in members raising over $11,000 to support further FFA experiences.

While the National FFA Organization and their Virginia FFA Association are an important part of Central High's agricultural education program, FFA does not stand alone; rather, it is part of a three-pronged approach to securing a strong foundation in all aspects of agricultural science. Classroom instruction and lab work, membership in FFA, and successful completion of a supervised agriculture experience (SAE) are the

Knowing how to maintain equipment is important for those who grow our food.

While animals are fun to pet, they need proper care and feeding, too.

goals for students in agriculture classes at Central High. An SAE allows students to secure information about agricultural careers while learning leadership and life skills under the supervision of teachers, family members, and other community leaders. At Central, fully 100% of FFA members had an active SAE experience this year (with over 80% completing more than one SAE project), and this achievement is expected to continue this academic year.

While these worthwhile, altruistic programs continue to make a difference in their community, Central High School's FFA leaders have made their mark at the state level as well. Since Central formed its FFA chapter, the school has seen a total of 22 members elevated to state leadership positions! Indeed, a member from the Central High School FFA has served as an officer at the state level for the past 8 years, bringing well deserved recognition to their school, families, and community. Both the 2003 and 2004 classes saw a member from Central's FFA rise to the level of president in the Virginia FFA. Central's current FFA Vice President and officer in charge of the 2009 *Food for America* program, Aaron

A brief lesson on equipment and creel limits helps everyone understand that, while fishing is fun, we all need to follow the rules.

To become good stewards, kids need to understand where food comes from.

Animals can be used for show or to provide companionship. Learning how to properly handle an animal teaches responsibility.

Heishman, was also a national finalist for the Agri-science Student of the Year in 2008.

"I chose to chair *Food for America* because I think it is one of the most vital things the FFA can do," states Heishman. "I have participated and helped with *Food for America* since I can remember." Organizing a program that can meet the needs of community members, peers, teachers, and the entire fourth grade at nearby WW Robinson Elementary School is quite a challenge, although Heishman feels it was no more so than organizing any of the other FFA programs. Approximately 40 of Heishman's fellow FFA members worked in teams of 2 or 3 to present interactive, educational lessons on such topics as beef and dairy cattle, goats, sheep, poultry and rabbits; farm equipment (uses and safety procedures); ATV vehicles and safety strategies; fishing; horses; and various other facets of farm life.

"Food doesn't come from a store...," states Heishman, adding, "there is a lot of hard work that goes into the production of it."

Fellow students Heather Crawford and Dyllan Chapins concur, adding that one of the main challenges of the day was keeping enthusiastic fourth graders in some semblance of a line while trying to get them to ask questions "one at a time." But it's hard not to bounce around some when there's so much to see and do, and it was clear by their smiles that the FFA team shared those same high spirits. With the children engaged and wanting to learn, all of their hard work was paying off. What was also clear was that these young adults were making a difference by working together—in their own lives and in their community, as well.

There's something about going to a school where everyone knows each other (and their horses and dogs, too) that brings a wistfulness to mind—like seeing a happy memory dressed in the fad of the day. When we see young adults working together on projects that benefit others as much as themselves, we see something we know we want for children everywhere—a chance to grow the skills needed to become productive members of our communities. The kids from Central have found a way to make this happen. Perhaps FFA member Hannah Schechtel said it best when she said, "Food for America allowed us to educate the younger generation and the public about agriculture ... To educate others about agriculture is a good feeling."

What was also clear was that these young adults were making a difference by working together—in their own lives and in their community as well.

Clearly, that good feeling was shared by all who attended the event, for although feet stayed wet and cold, hearts grew full and happy: When exuberant children grew noisy, farm animals stayed calm. And as tomorrow's leaders pulled curious minds in, adult hearts puffed out with pride. It was an amazing day.

Certainly no one—especially the fourth graders—cared how very wet their feet were getting. The kids just wanted their turn to pet the pig. □

Gail Brown is a retired teacher and school administrator.

When asked, "What did you do at school today?" how many kids can answer, "I fed a horse"?

Skinny

Maneuvering the creeks of the historic Eastern Shore

Water Fishing

story and photos by Charlie Petrocci

All I could do was smile as the fish pulled my kayak a little farther out into the creek. A glistening wake plowed past the cordgrass-lined banks, as my fish struggled for deeper water. Behind the backdrop of a colonial-era, waterfront home, willets blasted in the background, my spinning reel sang the whimsical tune of the struggle at hand, and incessant greenhead flies gave me a sense of place, so to speak. It wasn't long before I saw the redfish roll, revealing its bronze back and chubby, opaque belly. Holding him gently by the kayak gunwale, I backed out the leadhead lure and slipped the fish back into the creek. I had forgotten all about the greenheads, because this redfish was a worthy adversary on an early morning sojourn along a meandering Eastern Shore tidal creek. For me, it was a natural connection to this never-ending water world.

The Eastern Shore of Virginia is a land defined by water. Long, thin tidal creeks snake among forever marshes, in turn thinly stitched to upland maritime forests. For almost four centuries the region's history, heritage, and culture have been influenced as much by the ebb and flow of the tides as they have by economic change. With colonial settlement dating back to the early 17th century, small waterfront villages have depended on tidal rivers for transportation, communication, and subsistence. Native Americans used them for the same purposes. Today, several historic waterfront homes are located on former Indian clan occupation sites, and many of the area's rivers still carry their indigenous place names, a constant reminder of the Shore's cultural past. For both cultures, the daily pull of the tide was the heartbeat of survival in an unforgiving land. With modern conveniences like kayaks, canoes, and bug repellent, anglers can quietly explore these same waterways today, and with fishing rod in hand, replicate the routes of Indians, colonists, soldiers, smugglers, and escaped slaves.

Backwater Angling

Straddling the powerful Atlantic Ocean on one side and the graceful Chesapeake on the other, the Eastern Shore is embraced by water that regularly inundates myriad coastal bays, tidal creeks, and long, twisting guts. The shore is 400 years rich in cultural history and thousands of years rich in hosting a variety of wildlife. The peninsula becomes an aerial highway for countless migrating waterfowl, songbirds, hawks, and shorebirds each fall. Fish and shellfish abound in the waters. During the fall, cool nights and shorter days are the trigger pull for most fish—stripers, trout, flounder, drum, and other species—to exit the skinny water world and head off to deeper waters of the southeast. For anglers, this becomes a magical time of year to fish, trying to intercept these hard feeding and soon fleeing game fish.

Fishing from a kayak is forgiving. You don't need fancy or expensive gear to succeed. I prefer to use a fast action, six- to seven-foot medium light spinning rod spooled with quality 10-pound test line. I'll also use a 20-lb. test section of fluorocarbon leader attached by a barrel swivel to

©Charlie Petrocci

Many tidal creeks sport small, sandy beaches—great places to stretch out, wade fish, or take it all in from a slightly elevated viewpoint.

©Charlie Petrocci

give me some leverage for dealing with hard pulling fish, especially in clear waters around oyster shells.

Important angler tools include a hook remover, a short shaft net, polarized sun glasses, and maybe a backup fishing rod. I like to carry an assortment of lures, including leadheads with plastic trailers in pearl and chartreuse, gold spoons, swimming-type plugs, and even surface poppers. I use single hooks, since most fish are released. Occasionally I'll also bring bottom fishing tackle, such as single dropper rigs with weights and float rigs for drifting fresh bait through deep holes. Drifting for flounder is a blast out of a tupperware boat.

Wade fishing around sand bars is also an option, so wear old sneakers. Nothing like having a nice fat speckled trout swimming around your legs in clear creek water. In addition, I've had good luck on specks and stripers using clousers and deceivers connected to an 8-weight fly rod. The deceiver was invented by fishing legend Lefty Kreh while fishing for rockfish in the shallows of Tangier Sound.

> Long, thin tidal creeks snake among forever marshes, in turn thinly stitched to upland maritime forests.

As far as fishing technique goes, I'm all about comfort. Most of the time I just drift and cast around likely spots such as channels and small holes in creeks. If I want to sit tight, I either back up into the bank or use a small collapsible anchor which I've rigged up to feed from the cockpit area through a line guide near the bow. My kayak is a simple touring type, made for stability. I don't have any fancy rod holders or depth finder rigged around the cockpit. As far as I'm concerned, they are simply more things to carry and can get in the way of a running fish.

While paddling quiet waterways, I often find myself birding, checking out the architecture of historic homes, and closely studying the shoreline at low tide for the remnants of peoples long released from their tenacious hold on this land of the water world. Thus, fishing is often not what the trip is all about. It becomes much more since the Eastern Shore has so much more to offer. My outlook might best be summed up by a Robert Louis Stevenson quote: "I travel not to go anywhere, but to go." □

Charlie Petrocci is a maritime heritage researcher, writer, lecturer, and consultant who specializes in coastal traditions such as fisheries, seafood, and community folklife. He has lived on the Eastern Shore for the past 25 years.

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Plenty of uncrowded boat ramps are found down scenic back roads.

©Charlie Petrocci

Fishing villages such as Tangier are great places to paddle around or pick up bait.

Hot Spots and Launch Sites

The Eastern Shore has a number of good access points to drop in a boat, including DGIF and county boat ramps. Some are located in small towns that offer nearby amenities such as food, lodging, and fishing tackle. Other ramps and access points are located down long winding roads that dead end at a creek.

To pick one favorite skinny water fishing area is like trying to pick a favorite slab of ribs at a national cookout contest. They all taste good, but certainly some are better than others. Below is a list of easy access, productive fishing spots. All sites are located off of Route 13, the main artery of the peninsula.

Guard Shore, which is located on the end of Route 688, has a nice sandy beach for easy boat launching and good parking. This small neck of land is where Guilford Creek and Muddy Creek come together, and there are several small guts and creeks nearby that offer good fishing as well. Species active here include speckled trout, redfish, rockfish, and croaker. The name, Guard Shore, comes from the fact that it was a lookout site during the War of 1812 for British raiding parties from distant Tangier Island.

Oyster is a small seaside village on the lower end of the Shore. As its name implies, it was once a large landing site for local oysters and other shellfish. There is a good double ramp on the north side of the harbor, with plenty of parking. This drop-in site gives you access to beautiful marshes, creeks, and the confluence of Mockhorn and Sand Shoal channels. Deep holes can hold gray trout, speckled trout, flounder, and red drum. And if you can make it out to the flats area, you may spot tarpon—probably the most northern concentration of this otherwise southern waters, spectacular fish.

Willis Wharf is an interesting little town located east of Exmore off Route 603. There is a good boat ramp here with parking and an adjacent deck overlook. Nearby are state-of-the-art clam hatcheries. A paddle will take you out into Machipongo Channel, which hosts numerous deep holes and healthy shore-

©Charlie Petrocci

Skinny water fishing doesn't always mean big game fishing, but you'll enjoy the adventure.

VDGIF–GIS Lab, map courtesy of Lenee Pennington

Also of interest: Virginia's Seaside Heritage Program and Water Trail Online Guide. For more information, go to: www.deq.virginia.gov/coastal/homepage.html

lines to cast among. In the distance are both historic Cobb and Hog islands, noted for their great surf fishing. The channel and adjacent creeks host sharks, flounder, red drum, and trout. You'll learn the meaning of low tide here, especially during a full moon phase.

Chincoteague off of Route 175 is home to numerous boat ramps, located on both sides of the island. The east side offers easy access to waters around Assateague Island, while those on the west side put you out in Chincoteague Channel. One of my favorite drop-in sites is at the small park across from the high school. The hot species around these waters is, of course, flounder, but there are areas that hold kingfish, blues, gray trout, and rockfish during the fall months. The Assateague side of the island is more user friendly, especially during high boat traffic days.

Harborton, located off of Route 180, is a cool little bayside village that sits astride Pungoteague Creek. There is a fine boat ramp here and the river is wide with several deepwater holes and channel areas to fish. This is a good place to nail rockfish, redfish, croaker, trout, and sometimes even flounder. It's about a two-mile paddle down to the main channel opening to the bay.

Occohannock Creek has a fine boat ramp at Morley's Wharf located off Route 183. This beautiful creek has great history and is surrounded by pristine marshes. There are small guts and coves located along the creek and plenty of fishable areas to cast, too. Channel edges and holes will hold flounder, croaker, gray trout, rockfish, and sometimes red drum. It's approximately three miles down to the creek mouth to the bay.

In addition, the Department operates boat ramps and great fishing can be found at Red Bank Creek, Messongo Creek, and the town of Saxis. Keep in mind that weather and tides can make or break your skinny water trip so check accordingly. Always wear a life jacket; bring plenty of water, snacks, a small GPS, cell phone or small marine radio, sunscreen, hat, wading shoes, and a camera.

And, oh yeah, gallons of bug spray. □

Discover C
Wild

Virginia's Birding and Wildlife Trail Celebrates Five Years

by Martha W. Steger
illustrations by Spike Knuth

In the commonwealth's long history of firsts, its birding and wildlife trail is its most recent claim to fame. This year, the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail—the driving trail with many loops connecting to walking and hiking trails across the state—celebrates its fifth anniversary as the nation's first statewide wildlife viewing trail. Five years ago this month, officials dedicated the Piedmont Trail (13 loops) following development of the Coastal (18 loops) in 2002 and the Western (34 loops) trails in 2003.

Seeds of Economic Growth

Trails, whether wildlife- or heritage-based, are more than ends in themselves. Ted Eubanks, president and CEO of Fermata Inc., the company that has implemented trails in 21 states including Virginia, says, "If you're in economic development in the state of Virginia, you're going to highlight the quality of life because it places states like yours in an advantageous position."

A study conducted by the Conservation Management Institute and released in late 2008 formally addresses the impact of the trail on its 640,000 visitors and the many participating Virginia communities. From the thousands of people who had requested trail guides, a total of 5,000 individuals were randomly surveyed by mail and 30,439 by email as part of the study. From that sample, 772 of those mailed and 1,609 of those emailed responded. The latest U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey, which showed an 83 percent increase in wildlife viewing trip-related expenditures from 2001-2006, nicely complements the CMI study results, available at www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt.

ur Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail

Side

Emily Pels

Fishing on the Potomac River below Great Falls

Alisa Bailey, president and CEO of the Virginia Tourism Corporation—which is celebrating the 40th anniversary of the "Virginia is for Lovers" slogan this year—says, "Birding travelers certainly fit our present campaign of connecting travelers with a love of life and a passion for travel. Our research shows that those who engage in birding stay a whopping 75 percent longer than average and spend 42 percent more than our average visitor. Having the first statewide birding and wildlife trail has helped Virginia become a leader in sustainable tourism development and ecotourism experience. The statewide trail is also an excellent example of state agencies and the private sector tourism industry collaborating on a comprehensive and exciting project."

Jeff Trollinger

Manassas National Battlefield Park

Research also shows that travelers like attractions in close proximity to one another, and the VBWT is a natural complement to heritage sites and activities such as kayaking and photography. The trail links localities from the Potomac River on the north to the John H. Kerr Reservoir (Buggs Island Lake) in the south, and from the Atlantic Ocean to South Holston Lake straddling Virginia's western border with Tennessee. The diversity of scenic views along the way is matched only by the tremendous variety of wildlife.

Before the VBWT, anyone interested in birding had to do what Frederick Atwood, science teacher at Flint Hill School in Fairfax County, had to do: "... look at a map and explore likely-looking roads, only to find that the roads dead-ended in private property with no access to the bodies of water I wanted to look into, sometimes after several miles of driving down a neck. This was very frustrating, especially if I was driving a van full of kids. Now, in planning a field trip for students to an area that I am unfamiliar with, I use the VBWT route as the core of the field trip. And even in places that I am quite familiar with, the distinctive brown road signs have pointed me to good birding spots that I didn't know about."

Tim Hodge, a 17-year-old ardent birder in Nelson County who considers Atwood his birding mentor, says he's seen 171 species on the Rockfish Valley Trail, a route he's covered three times in its entirety among his varied birding experiences. A birder since age nine, Hodge adds, "Birding intersects with my interest in art and provides a good foundation for branching out into all fauna and flora in Virginia."

Branching Out

Birding travelers do branch out. Thelma Dalmas, who wrote some of the Lynchburg area copy in the *Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail* guide for the Piedmont, says, "We use the guides for anything more than 25 miles from our home. I know my home plot, but I don't know the out-of-the-way places for the rest of the state. If we're going somewhere, we adjust our route to encompass more of the trail—and we know other people who do the same thing."

Even though birding can be an inexpensive hobby, birders are strong earners and spenders, which benefits Virginia's businesses and tax coffers. Total direct economic impact of the VBWT was estimated at $8,638,895 per year by CMI's Encounter Survey. Median annual family income exceeded $75,000; and greater than 72 percent of all respondents had com-

©Dwight Dyke

Hungry Mother State Park, Smyth County

Jeff Trollinger

Bullpasture River, Highland County

To order a Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail Guide ($8.50), go to: www.dgif.virginia.gov and click on the "Shop Online" button.

pleted at least four years of college, with more than 40 percent having earned a graduate degree.

The significance of this data cannot be overestimated because, "Just as the trail and its guides provide an incentive for people to come, local folks are more apt to support a program when they see people coming," says Allen Hale, chairman of the Nelson County Board of Supervisors, a 45-year birder, and owner of Buteo Books store.

Local as well as state officials sought to take advantage of federal funding made available: about $1.1 million in Transportation Enhancement Grants (which had to be matched by staff and in-kind support from the Virginia Tourism Corporation and other partners), and a $300,000 grant from the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program. Most of the cost of the trail was in research and development; for example, site evaluations followed by publication development. With completely free access to the trail, wildlife viewers contribute significantly to the Department annually through House Bill 38, license plate sales, nongame fund contributions, and other license sales (duck stamps purchased by birders to support wetlands conservation, for example).

In the southwest Virginia town of Saltville, director of tourism Charlie Bill Totten was one of those who knew years ago that economic development could come from birding in

Jeff Trollinger

Shenandoah Mountain Range

the area. "We have the only inland saline marsh in Virginia," he says. As a result, Saltville over the years has recorded several species of birds that would normally only be found in eastern Virginia. Totten sings the praises of the Salt Trail and points to the recent resurfacing of a wooden trestle headed four miles north out of town as providing public access to "... one of the greatest blue heron rookeries on the East Coast."

Saltville businessman Brandon Gates, manager of Food Country, agrees on the economic stimulation that birding can bring. He cites the parking lot adjacent to his store where birders park and come in to buy drinks and foodstuffs.

Success stories repeat themselves on the eastern side of the state. Bruce and Carol Evans, owners of Cape Charles House Bed and Breakfast, book early every year for fall's Eastern Shore Birding Festival (Sept. 17–20, 2009), which has grown with the development of the VBWT. The Evanses pride themselves on accommodating birders year-round with very early breakfasts and with services such as arranging certified ecotour guides for the barrier islands.

People who care about economic development as well as about quality-of-life issues see birding as an activity that will expand, not only as baby boomers retire but also with the education of a younger generation. Mary Arginteanu of Richmond, member of a coalition led by Richmond Audubon, master naturalists and master gardeners, says, "Inner-city students can get as turned on to a great blue heron as kids that live in the suburbs. The birding and wildlife trail has helped us get a lot of inner-city kids outdoors. We've had Girl Scouts and Brownies on the James River Park Trail see two owls being mobbed by a blue-gray gnatcatcher—and that was exciting!"

Arginteanu had a letter from a grateful scout leader for what the coalition had done for "her girls." "Once you get the kids out there, they just love being nature detectives," Arginteanu adds.

At least one locality, however, has found it challenging to market its section of the VBWT. Roger Mayhorn of Buchanan says their part of the trail appears to be used almost exclusively by locals. "Occasionally, when we are leading a bird walk with our own group on a section of the trail, we'll get a birder or two who have seen our outing posted on our listserv and will come to join us—but that is the extent of it."

In an attempt to attract more birders, Buchanan is promoting its annual Coalfields Folk Life Festival, which includes guided bird walks, more heavily each year.

As for the trail's future, David Whitehurst, director, Wildlife Resources Bureau, says, "We know that no one agency, one locality, or one person is ever going to accomplish the monumental task of heightening awareness and use of the trail. Only by increasing partnerships among all of the entities involved can we secure the success of the trail for the next five—the next fifty—years." □

An Accomack County native, Martha W. Steger is a Midlothian-based, freelance writer and editor who spent 25 years as director of public relations for the Virginia Tourism Corporation.

Jeff Trollinger

Mountain Lake, Giles County

Retrievers like to brag a little about their hunting buddies, and it is pretty darn humiliating for your dog when the two of you are the last to leave the shooting field and have to walk past some snickering Boykin or Cocker Spaniels laughing at your poor performance. Yeah, I know, you promised yourself that this year was going to be different, but somehow life got in the way of target practice.

What is even more embarrassing is that you humans actually call dove shooting *"hunting."* The only hunting I've seen you do is drive around in an air-conditioned vehicle looking for sunflower, corn, or millet fields, hoping to catch a flight pattern of the bird of peace. Then, around the first of September or so, you park your derrière in the middle of one of those fields—in a comfy beach chair—as if you're getting a late season tan. On top of that, your poor retriever has to sit in 90° heat in his fur coat, panting like a steam engine, while you bask in your shorts taking pot shots at a gray, acrobatically inclined, feathered dart.

Speaking of feathers... Doves must have the tear-away type. They unravel faster than an executive bonus at AIG. Think about it. You have given us a headache by shooting your 12-gauge in our ears. Then, you fuss and yell at us because we don't just perk up and run over a crispy, hot field to fetch a bird you finally scratched down after an inordinate (who can count *that* high?) number of shots. Do you have any idea what it feels like to run around with a feather pillow in your mouth on a searing hot summer day?

I do not call that hunting. No sir, I truly do not!

This year, how about showing a little more consideration for your best friend by having a bowl of fresh, cold water ready for us while we are doing our best to utilize our inefficient cooling system? It never looks good on your club resume to have your retriever pass out due to heat exhaustion, or to spend the evening explaining to your wife and children why you and their treasured pet spent most of the day in the emergency room of your favorite vet! Your family deserves a little better than that, especially if you've left them at home during the final holiday weekend of the summer.

There is something else I have been meaning to ask... What is it with you guys in camo *shorts* and t-shirts? I assume you wear camouflage for the purpose of concealment, but with all that bare skin showing, you might as well bring in the big lights they use at movie premieres for all the hiding you are doing. If a dove can spot a kernel of grain in a field at 45 yards, what makes you think it can't see all that sweating epidermis you're flaunting?

So remember, it wouldn't do you folks any harm to get some shooting practice in *before* the season starts. Just as you like to show us off with a fine retrieve, we want the other dogs to admire how well our masters shoot. And don't think we don't notice. We may not have taken calculus in obedience school but we *can* count. If you don't believe us, let us watch you put three dog biscuits in your pocket, have us sit, and only give us two. We know there's a third one in there!

Remember, nobody leaves a dove field any prouder than a dog and his shooter who are the first to get their limit.

Keep a leg up,
Luke

Luke, a black Labrador retriever, spends his spare time with best friend Clarke C. Jones hunting up good stories. You can visit Luke and Clarke on their Web site at www.clarkecjones.com.

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

Photo Contest Reminder

The deadline for submitting photographs for the 2009 *Virginia Wildlife* Photography Contest is **November 2, 2009**. Winning photographs will appear in the special March 2010 issue of the magazine. For more information about the contest and to view last year's edition online, visit the Department's Web site at: **http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/photocontest**.

Journal

2009 Outdoor Calendar of Events

Unless otherwise noted, for current information and registration on workshops go to the "Upcoming Events" page on our Web site at www.HuntFishVA.com or call 804-367-7800.

September 5: Dove season opens.

September 10, 12 and 17: *Lights, Camera, Action: Photographing Colors, Textures, and Patterns in the Garden;* with Lynda Richardson; Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond; www.lewisginter.org.

September 12: *Jakes Event;* Page Valley Sportsman's Club; contact Art Kasson at (540) 622-6103 or artkasson@yahoo.com.

September 12–13: *Western Regional Big Game Contest,* Harrisonburg; www.iwla-rh.org.

September 17–20: *Eastern Shore Birding and Wildlife Festival,* Cape Charles; www.esvachamber.org/festivals/birding/ or call 757-787-2460.

September 26: *Youth Deer Hunting Day* (ages 15 and younger).

September 26: *National Hunting and Fishing Day.*

September 26–27: *Eastern Regional Big Game Contest and State Championship,* Franklin; www.vpsa.org.

September 26: *Women Exploring Loudoun Outdoors.* Contact Loudoun County Chapter of Izaak Walton League of America at (540) 535-8891 or welo.event@lcciwla.org.

October 17: *Youth Fall Turkey Hunt Day* (ages 15 and younger).

November 7: *Northern Shenandoah Valley Birding Festival,* Winchester. □

Dwight Dyke

Hunters and Anglers Contribute to the Economy

According to the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), Virginia hunters and anglers have a significant impact on our local economy, spending $1.3 billion a year!

The group reported in early 2008 that, based on the report "Hunting and Fishing: Bright Stars of the American Economy," (www.sportsmenslink.org/reports_and_data) hunters and anglers have an immense impact on the economy at both the national and state levels. In Virginia alone, spending by hunters and anglers directly supports 24,000 jobs, which puts $683 million worth of paychecks into pockets of working residents around the state. Of course, government coffers also benefit. Spending by sportsmen in pursuit of these outdoor activities generates $128 million in state and local taxes. These latest figures demonstrate that, season after season, hunters and anglers are driving the economy from big businesses to rural towns, through booms and recessions.

Jeff Crane, who serves as president of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, made this observation: "Because sportsmen enjoy hunting or fishing alone or in small groups, they are overlooked as a constituency and as a substantial economic force." He added, "When you compare spending by hunters and anglers to other sectors, their impact on the state's economy becomes more tangible."

NSSF president Doug Painter noted, "Spending by sportsmen benefits not only the manufacturers of hunting and fishing related products, but everything from local mom and pop businesses to wildlife conservation. And because most hunting and fishing takes place in rural areas, much of the spending benefits less affluent parts of the state."

Indeed, as reported by the NSSF, when sportsmen's spending is thought of in business terms and compared to other sectors of the economy, it is quite remarkable. □

Lifetime Licenses

Open the door to a lifetime of enjoyment in the great outdoors of Virginia with a lifetime freshwater fishing, hunting or trout license!
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by Beth Hester

Four Years in Paradise
by Osa Johnson, forward by Mary Zeiss Stange
2004 Stackpole Books: Sisters of the Hunt Series
www.stackpolebooks.com

"We were attempting to make an authentic film record of vanishing wild life as it existed in its last and greatest stronghold. And, if in some over-civilized future, cities should crowd out the elephants and wars should bomb the giraffes from the plains and the baboons from the treetops, our films would stand as a record for posterity."

Osa Johnson, 1941

In 1924, Osa Johnson struck out for remote Kenya with her cinematographer husband, Martin. This was the second of four trips into Africa to chronicle a way of life that was already being threatened by the encroachment of modern civilization.

Osa was an outdoorswoman, writer, and occasional vaudeville performer who had developed a taste for gardening and a passion for hunting and fishing as a child growing up in the Midwest. She was a 'stand-up' kind of woman and, by all accounts, a fabulous shot. During Martin and Osa's four-year adventure at their compound at Lake Paradise, her gun, her vegetable garden, and her Hardy fly rod would unfailingly provide food for the intrepid duo, and also for the 200 or so assistants and caretakers who occupied their sprawling camp.

This book, a reprint of the original version, is an important document for a number of reasons. From an environmental perspective, it chronicles early efforts at conservation and reflects Martin and Osa's belief that the efforts of artists, naturalists, and scientists might help to document and preserve the last of untouched, pre-colonial Africa. The lush and unforgiving forests and the abundance of available fish and game seem almost fantasy-like, given the current state of our stressed planet. Yet in 1924, the African continent was already under the gun, so to speak, and the films and photographs produced during the Johnsons' adventures served both to entertain and educate the public once their post-safari lecture tours began.

From the standpoint of history, *Four Years in Paradise* documents a way of traveling and an approach to exploration that will never come again. The tactics and sheer effort of will it took to trek hundreds of miles, to transport thousands of pounds of gear while bushwhacking almost every step of the way, is amazing by our modern standards.

It must also be mentioned that Osa and Martin were products of the times in which they lived, and some of their contradictory attitudes toward the "boys" who helped run their camp reflect this. And yet, the Johnsons were often criticized for treating many of the native Africans like members of their own family.

From a purely literary perspective, it is a detail-crammed, strenuous true life adventure tale from a woman's perspective, and as personal narrative, it holds its own among such enduring classics as Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa* and Beryl Markham's *West With the Night*. □

"Be careful, Doris, there are some sharp drop-offs in here."

Don't Forget:

Mandatory Duck Stamps & HIP

All hunters who plan to hunt doves, waterfowl, rails, woodcock, snipe, coots, gallinules, or moorhens in Virginia must be registered with the Virginia Harvest Information Program (HIP). HIP is required each year and a new registration number is needed for the 2009-2010 hunting season. To obtain a new HIP number, register online at **www.VAHIP.com** or call 1-888-788-9772.

In addition, to hunt waterfowl in Virginia hunters must obtain a Federal Duck Stamp, and the Virginia Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Stamp (unless license exempt). The annual Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Stamp can be purchased for $10.00 (resident or nonresident) from DGIF license agents or from the Department's Web site. To request collector stamps and prints, contact Mike Hinton by email at ducks@hintons.org.

Congratulations to fisheries biologist Paul Bugas (C), who was recently recognized by Trout Unlimited (TU) as their Conservationist of the Year *for Virginia! Bugas has worked for the Department for 32 years and is currently stationed in the Verona regional office. Over the course of his career, Bugas has been tireless in his efforts to manage and monitor wild trout populations—specifically, developing special regulation trout streams and developing the Lake Moomaw and Jackson River trout fisheries—and educate kids through Trout Unlimited's Trout in the Classroom program. Bugas is joined by John Ross (L) of TU and Gary Martel, DGIF fisheries division head.*

Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

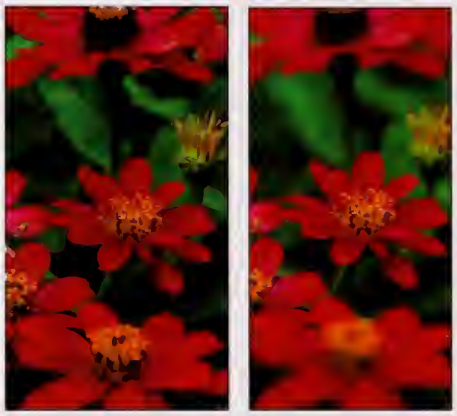
Focus in on Depth-of-Field

Learning how to control depth-of-field is a 'must know' aspect of photography. It is an important tool that you can use to change how a photograph is viewed or perceived. Depth-of-field translates into how much is in focus in front of and behind your subject, and is controlled by your camera's aperture settings. It can help to emphasize a subject or it can define many details in a scene.

When you select a subject to photograph, think about how much you want in focus. Depth-of field works in a ratio of one-third in focus in front of a subject and two-thirds in focus behind a subject. Which aperture you select will determine the one-third / two-thirds ratio in inches, feet, or yards. The lens you use will also come into play when deciding how much depth-of-field you need in a photograph.

Aperture refers to the diameter of the lens opening through which light is allowed onto the film or camera's sensor. It is defined by numbers relating to the size of the opening. The larger the aperture opening, f.2.8 for example, the more light is allowed onto the film or sensor and the least amount around your subject will be in focus. This is considered *minimum* depth-of-field. The smaller the opening, say f.22.0, the lesser the amount of light allowed in, which ensures that you will have as much in focus as possible in front of and behind your subject. This is considered *maximum* depth-of-field.

If you have an adjustable camera, it should allow you to control the aperture settings in both manual and aperture priority modes. (Check your camera manual for more details.) The best way to actually see what depth-of-field does to photographs is to place your camera on a tripod and select a subject with something in front of and behind it. Then,



Look at these two photographs and see if you don't notice a difference in the depth-of-field. The one on the left was shot using f.4.0 and the one on the right was shot using f.22.0. Which do you like best and why? ©*Lynda Richardson*

using aperture priority, or manual if you're good with exposure corrections, focus on your subject and take pictures using the highest and lowest aperture settings and then one setting in the middle. Do not change your focus or move your camera while doing this exercise because it will mess up your results.

What you should notice right away is a big difference in the three images relating to what is in focus. Try this in several different situations and with different lenses and you will begin to see how controlling and understanding depth-of-field can work for you. Good luck and have fun!!! □

You are invited to submit one to five of your best photographs to "Image of the Month," Virginia Wildlife Magazine, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Send original slides, super high-quality prints, or high-res jpeg, tiff, or raw files on a disk and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or other shipping method for return. Also, please include any pertinent information regarding how and where you captured the image and what camera and settings you used, along with your phone number. We look forward to seeing and sharing your work with our readers.

Image of the Month

Congratulations to David Lyster of Charlottesville for his image of an adult mourning dove and two young, or squab as they're called. David reports that he noticed an adult flying in and out of a stone building near Free Union, went to investigate, and found the young birds in a loft window. Nikon D-40 digital camera, 105mm lens, ISO 400, 1/160th, f.3.2. Very cool!

On The Water

by Tom Guess

If you don't have a good day trailering...

Have you ever found yourself getting ready to go on a trip but running late? This can cause you to do things that increase your chances of making a mistake—one that might ruin the whole day.

It was just one of those days. I woke up early and seemed to be doing well on time management when I realized that everything I was trying to do was taking extra long. I didn't connect my trailer the night before as I usually do, since I thought I would have plenty of time. I started my freshly painted truck with its new back bumper and took a moment to admire the smell of new paint as I searched for the pigtail plug for my trailer lights.

I walked over to take a quick look at my trailer to get my bearings before connecting it. Often when I connect my trailer alone, I use a 6-foot section of PVC pipe and place it vertically next to the tongue on my trailer to use as a reference point when I'm backing up, to line up the hitch. I returned to my truck in somewhat of a trot, running even later now against my self-imposed schedule. I got in my truck, backed up to the trailer to a point where I felt I was close to having the hitch lined up, and stopped. I stepped out and went back to see how I did. Everything lined up closely enough to work. I lowered the trailer jack so that the ball would seat itself inside the coupler, raised the jack into a horizontal position so that my little wheel wouldn't drag the road, connected my safety chains in the common "X" pattern, and connected my lights and visually checked my tires. Finally, I pulled forward and checked my lights. Everything was in order.

Since I was running late, I headed out of the drive a little faster than normal and, almost instantly, heard a loud "clunk" and felt my truck surge a bit. I did what many folks in the same situation would do—hit the brake—and immediately heard a series of bangs, clanks, and other metallic, scratchy noises that didn't sound so good. I soon realized that in my haste I forgot one of the important steps of hooking up a trailer. I didn't lock the locking lever on my trailer coupler and put the pin in it!

I was a bit nervous about what I would find when I went to the back of my truck. As I peered around the tailgate with teeth gritted, I found that my safety chains worked as planned, but the tongue of the trailer rose up a bit from the dip in my driveway. This was about the same time that I applied the brakes, which caused the coupler to bounce off the ball and make contact with my newly installed rear bumper. This left quite a dent and put me in a rather foul mood.

Performing regular trailer maintenance and connecting your trailer completely and correctly to the proper-sized vehicle are just as important as maintaining your boat. Remember, if you do suffer the misfortune of your trailer becoming disconnected, slow down gradually without slamming on the brakes. As I discovered that day, if you don't have a good day trailering, you won't have a good day boating! □

Tom Guess, U. S. Coast Guard (Ret.), serves as a statewide coordinator for the Boating Safety Education Program at the DGIF.

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Dining In

by Ken and Maria Perrotte

Bacon-Wrapped Dove Breasts

Dove hunts have been a southern tradition for generations. The fast-flying game birds present challenges for wingshooters, opportunities for enthusiastic retrievers, and tasty morsels for any dining table.

One of the first opportunities we had to enjoy this delicacy came following a dove hunt with Shep Rouse, owner and winemaker of Rockbridge Vineyards in Raphine, Va. Upon firing up the grill, Rouse observed he was missing a key ingredient—bacon. Necessity is the mother of invention and pepperoni tacked to the dove breasts served as an adequate, albeit spicy, substitute.

We've met lots of skeptical people who wondered about how dove might taste. Cooked as an appetizer one day for a group of military officers from England, they could barely maintain their British stiff upper lip, what with all the smacking and "Wow" exclamations.

This is a simple, can't miss recipe.

Bacon-Wrapped Dove Breasts

- 12 skinless dove breasts
- Garlic pepper
- 6 slices bacon (we like the center cut variety—use thin sliced)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ⅓ cup dry red wine

Lightly season breasts with garlic pepper. Wrap each in a half-piece of bacon and secure with a toothpick that has been moistened with water. (Use a full slice if you're a bacon nut. Don't use thick sliced bacon as it takes too long to cook. You can cook these on a grill, but then you can't add the wine seasoning and, if not careful, you can dry out the meat.) Add olive oil to a skillet and heat over medium heat. Add doves and brown on all sides—a couple minutes on each side ensures cooked bacon. Remove skillet from heat for about 10–15 seconds and adjust burner to low. Before returning skillet to burner, add wine. Removing the pan from heat for 10–15 seconds helps prevent flare-ups. Also, don't pour wine directly from the bottle. Pour into measuring cup first. Although rare, flames can follow any beverage with alcohol back into the bottle, causing an explosion. Cover skillet and cook for five or six minutes or until doves are completely done.

Serves three or four people.

This dish pairs very nicely with garlic green beans with tomatoes. Any kind of rice, from a basic boxed chicken flavor to white rice to wild rice (Ken's favorite) can't miss.

Garlic Green Beans

- 1 pound fresh green beans
- 1½ tablespoon olive oil
- 1 or 2 large garlic clove, chopped
- 4 or 5 Roma tomatoes, sliced about 1 inch thick
- Salt and pepper to taste

Wash and snap fresh green beans. Add oil and garlic to pan. Heat over medium-low until garlic softens—about two minutes. Add green beans and cook another two minutes. Increase heat to medium high and add tomatoes, salt and pepper. Continue cooking a few more minutes—only until beans are crisp/tender and tomatoes are warm and soft.

Wine pairing: Dove breasts beg for a nice pinot noir, but bacon can be smoky, salty and strong. Pull the bacon off and nosh first on the succulent dove breasts. Save the bacon for dessert! Or add it to tomorrow morning's omelet. □

Dwight Dyke

Virginia Wildlife Outdoor Catalog

2008 Limited Edition *Virginia Wildlife* Collector's Knife

Our 2008 Collector's knife has once again been customized by Buck Knives. The knife features a red-tailed hawk engraving, augmented by a natural woodgrain handle and gold lettering. A distinctive, solid cherry box features birds of prey.

Item # VW-408 $90.00 each (plus $7.25 S&H)

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Check out this new DVD that features several types of home habitat gardens and interviews with the homeowners who created them.

Item #VW-254 $12.00 each

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To learn more about the Virginia Apprentice Hunting License, call (866) 721-6911 or log on to www.HuntFishVA.com.

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